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GRAVEYARDS AS A MENACE TO THE COMMON-WEAL.

BY LOUIS WINDMÜLLER.

A RATIONAL disposition of human remains has become a serious question wherever the population of cities has increased in greater proportion than that of the country at large; and at the present moment it deserves earnest consideration, since infectious diseases prevailing in tropical climes where we carry warfare may be brought here.

The custom of burying bodies in close proximity to each other at insufficient distances from human habitation is reprehensible in the highest degree. During the continuance of their natural decay, extending over a period of some five and twenty years, they contaminate the air, pollute the earth and defile the springs, threatening disease. If we could overcome foolish prejudice and false sentiment which prevail against the ancient custom of burning the dead, we would correct a grievous wrong.

The strongest motive for the interment of remains is affection. It is customary to visit the graves of our friends, dwell in thought on the acts of kindness they have done, and adorn the mounds which cover their bodies with fragrant flowers. It is considered the sacred duty of a feeling heart thus to commemorate at least the anniversaries of their passage from the world. And the unwillingness of men to cut short the progress of the corruption which goes on, unseen, beneath these mounds, can only be explained by a sentimental yet stubborn resolution that as far as they can prevent it the remains shall never be disturbed. Having laid them to "final rest," they fondly expect them to stay in the selected inclosure, because the ground is conveyed by a title supposed to guarantee possession for all time to come.

But what do these promises mean when neither the dead nor

their living representatives can longer assert their claims? Relatives could not, if they would, dispute the right of municipalities to eminent domain nor the decision of many courts that corpses after a time cease to be property. As a matter of fact, the expectation that cemeteries shall afford a permanent resting place to the bodies interred in them is conclusively discredited by experience. Writing of old Boston graveyards, Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "The stones have been shuffled about like chess-men; nothing short of the day of judgment will tell whose dust lies beneath." When King's Chapel burial ground, in Boston, was recently invaded by a subway under Tremont street, a colony of forgotten ancestors was discovered, and promptly removed. But, of all American cities, New York—where about a hundred graveyards have been destroyed or partially abandoned since it became a city—offers the most striking examples of the changeableness of "resting places," which the history of some of its old churchyards will demonstrate.

In the early part of this century graves were in evidence in New York to such an extent that a splenetic Englishman who came to visit our shores speedily returned when he found every street lined with headstones. Tombs, such as exist around Trinity and St. Paul to-day, encircled numerous other churches. As congregations grew, many of them sought other burial grounds which were then considered safer from disturbance on account of their distance. These have in turn been overtaken and absorbed by the ever growing city.

The first graveyard in New York was situated on Morris street, near Broadway. It was removed and the ground sold at auction in 1676, when a plot was acquired opposite Wall street, described in the first charter of the city, on April 22, 1686, as "the new burial ground without the gate." It was used as such, in conjunction with Trinity Church, until city interment was prohibited. There were many graves around the old Reformed Church, called the Middle Dutch, at Nassau, Cedar and Liberty streets, which was dedicated in 1729. British soldiers were quartered there between 1776 and 1783. It was turned into a post office in 1844, and sold to the Mutual Life Insurance Company in 1882. Of numerous bones discovered when the Mutual Building was erected, none were identified.

In 1853, when Beekman street was widened, some graves in

the yard of the Presbyterian Brick Church, on the site of the present Printing House Square, were disturbed, and in 1857, when Henry J. Raymond erected the New York Times Building, the remaining bodies were removed to a block bounded by Christie, Houston, Stanton and Forsyth streets, which had been used by three Presbyterian congregations as cemeteries since 1807. When this ground was sold in 1865 the bodies, or what was left of them, were once more disturbed. No vestige remains of the numerous graves that place once contained.

St. John's burial ground, at Clarkson, Hudson and Leroy streets, formerly the property of Trinity Parish, has recently been condemned by the city and converted into a public park. Few bodies being claimed, a majority were allowed to remain. Children may now play on the turf which covers the bones of their ancestors.

About 1840, the Methodist Church on Second street, between Avenue A and First Avenue, was turned into a public school. Some 1,500 bodies that had been placed there since the beginning of the century, were not moved until 1860. Of that number fifteen only were claimed by relatives. One gentleman abandoned the skeleton of his own father, because the skull seemed too small, and the charge for separate burial too large. He therefore allowed the remains to be placed, with the others, in a common grave in Evergreen Cemetery.

About 1832 some merchants bought ground on Second street, between First and Second Avenues, and created the "New York City Marble Cemetery." Among them was Robert Lenox, who was buried in 1839, in a vault of the First Presbyterian Church, about No. 16 Wall street. When other bodies were removed with that congregation to Fifth avenue and Twelfth street, the remains of Robert were taken to this cemetery, and in 1880 they were joined by those of James, his public spirited son. Here Thomas Addis Emmet, the famous jurist, was buried; here also ex-President James Monroe and John Ericsson, builder of our monitors, rested until removed. For some time past more bodies have been taken from this cemetery than have been buried there. Long shamefully neglected, the grounds have recently been cleared of rubbish. Graceful monuments to the once wealthy dead might please the eye, if they were not overshadowed by miserable dwellings of the living poor.

Another "Marble Cemetery," situated one block west, is hidden by squalid houses which entirely surround it; a mysterious alley leading to it from Second Avenue is closed to the public by tall iron gates. The creditors of one Selleck Nichols conceived, about 1830, the idea of turning this part of his land into a burial ground; realizing better prices for dead tenants than they could have obtained from the living, they succeeded in getting Nichols out of difficulties. Some two thousand bodies lie there; the plot-owners included Chancellor James Kent, Dr. David Hosak and Daniel Lord. Nevertheless, the place is practically abandoned to inhabitants of adjacent tenements, who use it as a dumping ground for offal; mounds of the dead are covered with what is filthy and worthless. As deceased owners can give no title, the plot cannot be sold, and must remain worse than useless until "condemned" for the benefit of the public. It would make a capital playground for children of the poor.

When St. Mark's Cemetery, at the corner of Eleventh street and Second avenue, was abolished the bodies were transported into a common grave at Evergreen and dwellings erected which, once the pride of that neighborhood, have long since assumed an air of shabby gentility. St. Mark's Churchyard, opposite, is as yet in restricted use. Here are the remains of Peter Stuyvesant, Governor Daniel D. Tompkins, and Philip Hone; the body of Alexander T. Stewart rested here until it was stolen.

On December 17, 1729, a Portuguese Jew deeded to his co-religionists a plot of ground between James and Oliver streets, near Chatham square, to be used as a burial ground for all time. When the Bowery was extended southward in 1856, the larger part of this cemetery was condemned. In passing, I saw contractors cart away bones and skulls in broad daylight. A small, almost triangular, plot south of Oliver street, covered with mouldy tombstones bearing Hebrew inscriptions, remains undisturbed and unheeded.

Between 1846 and 1852, when burial within the limits of the city was practically prohibited, a number of cemeteries were located on Long Island in the old town of Newtown. These consist of:

Calvary.....	with 300	acres of ground and 600,000 bodies.
Lutheran.....	" 400	" " 175,000 "
Cypress Hill.....	" 400	" " 125,000 "
Evergreen.....	" 400	" " 90,000 "
Several others.....	" 825	" " 60,000 "

Eighteen hundred acres of charnel fields cover one-tenth part of a district which contains 25,000 inhabitants, and a million of dead bodies. These cemeteries are close to each other, between four and five and one-half miles from the City Hall of the enlarged city, constituting almost its geographical centre; they are as near the Battery as the entrance to Central Park, three miles nearer than Columbia College. The ground between them and the East River is sure to be improved; it would furnish a natural outlet for the congested population of the eastern districts in Manhattan. A bridge over Blackwell's Island, which could be built for a comparatively small sum, would make Newtown more accessible than Harlem is, and draw a multitude of residents to a territory now largely dedicated to the dead. The city authorities should prohibit interments before the number is allowed to swell so that their removal shall be a physical impossibility.

In 1860, when bodies interred in the cemetery of the Eighteenth Street Methodist Church were removed from Forty-fourth street and Eighth avenue to huge vaults in the rear of the church on Nineteenth street, it was considered quite an undertaking; fifteen to twenty were piled over each other, and many were crushed by the weight of those placed upon them. The son of the sexton, who assisted in the removal, fainted and lost the sense of smell, which he never recovered. In 1875, some eight hundred of these bodies, all that could then be found, were again removed to a common grave at Woodlawn.

I might refer to other churchyards which have been forgotten; one of the oldest was the South Dutch Reformed, opened in 1691, on Garden street (now Exchange place), on the north side, between Broad and William streets, the headstones of which remained in sight of the occupants of adjoining buildings long after the destruction of the church.

These examples show how delusive is the presumption that the "dwellings of the dead" are secure against intrusion. Parts of Calvary, where the remains of Captain Raphael Semmes rest, show the example of a constantly used cemetery, which apparently is neglected. Burials number 18,000 annually; seventeen only out of 13,000 owners provide for the care of their plots. When sold the trustees are not obliged to look after them, so that most graves are slighted. Innumerable stones, many having an ungainly appearance, are placed close together, barely leaving room for vegetation.

A visit to any old cemetery would convince the impartial observer that, after their departure, affection for the remains of our dear ones dies out sooner than we care to acknowledge. Few stones of recent dates attest that the inmates have not been forgotten; the rest are in a state of greater or less decay. Everybody fondly hopes that his memory will last. It is, nevertheless, a fact that within the life of one generation the preceding one is generally doomed to oblivion; it takes more time for the flesh of a body to decompose than its memory is apt to live. And to save the feelings of the few survivors who remember the deceased for a brief period, we allow the putrifying remains of one who would have shrunk from inflicting injury, while living, to become an unnecessary menace after his death.

A great obstacle to the only rational treatment of remains has always been and is now the expectation of a resurrection of the actual body, which very many cannot separate from the belief in immortality.

According to the faith of the Egyptians, the soul after death had for thousands of years to pass through the bodies of different animals, returning finally in a purified state to the body it once had occupied. The preservation of the body became, therefore, an object of the utmost importance, and corpses were embalmed by a costly and tedious process. The Egyptians considered their houses mere hostleries, their tombs dwellings, for the construction of which everybody prepared according to his means.

The Jews adopted the custom of Egyptian burial in a modified form. Carefully washing the body, they placed it, wrapped in a winding sheet or shroud, in a distant cave. The Talmud expresses an expectation of resurrection, even on the advent of the Messiah, when the righteous in Israel would enjoy a millennium of bliss.

The Mohammedans look for a resurrection of the body and its reunion with the soul at doomsday. Hence, they bury each body in a separate grave, and consider its disturbance a sacrilege. Large tracts of valuable lands, over which contagion has often spread with alarming rapidity, are wasted; soil and climate favor production of abundant crops, if corn were planted instead of corpses.

Misconception of the meaning of resuscitation induced early Christians to discard the pyre, the use of which Hindoos, Greeks and Romans had found expedient, and to adopt the Jewish

custom of burial. God, doubtless, has the power to collect not only bones but the very atoms which compose our mortal frames, whether they consist of ashes into which a Gorini furnace had converted them in an hour, and which then were scattered to the four winds of heaven, or whether they had gradually been turned by decomposition into a heap of dust. The slow decay injures the living; it can avail the dead nothing.

Objection to cremation by members of the medical and legal professions on the assumption that poison cannot be detected in ashes has been generally abandoned. In suspicious cases intestines might be preserved before the rest of the corpse is consigned to the furnace; but, in any case, fire would scarcely consume a mineral poison. On the other hand, when mineral poison is found in the stomach of a disinterred body which had been embalmed, it cannot be considered a conclusive proof of crime, because the fluid injected into such bodies usually contains arsenic. Henry Thompson, an English authority, claims that, out of five hundred thousand burials, barely five have occurred which required disinterment for the purpose of any investigation.

Some people shrink with horror from the possibility of being burned alive, but the danger is no greater than that of being buried alive. The former, indeed, may be preferable, as the agony would be over once and for all. But neither will happen, if proper medical precautions are taken.

There are other important questions of public and private economy connected with this subject. In China graves are scrupulously guarded against intrusion, because the spirits of the departed are supposed to hover over their graves until they become reunited with their bodies. Consequently, railroads can get no franchise to cross whole provinces which are used for cemeteries; and which are closed to civilization till the time of the Chinese resurrection.

In Continental Europe an average period of 25 years is generally allowed for the occupancy of a grave; in most cases its ownership reverts to the municipality, so that it may be used anew at the expiration of that period. This may seem brutal, but experience shows that it is necessary, and that here we rarely remain in possession of a lot which we purchase from a suburban cemetery longer than fifty years. The dead of London require an annual waste of 23 acres of valuable ground. If 4,000 corpses are crowded

into the space of one acre, the limit in the case of the most populated graveyard, and if we accept the present rate of mortality, 20 per 1,000 inhabitants, as the standard, New York, with a population of 3,500,000, would have to provide room for 70,000 corpses, and would require annually $17\frac{1}{2}$ acres to bury them in. Unless the custom is changed the available room in the vicinity of all large cities will gradually be absorbed by remains of the dead.

In considering the welfare of individuals, the expenditure of one may benefit another, but citizens should be treated on equal terms. With the exception of Greenwood, almost all cemeteries used in the neighborhood of New York are either poorly managed by churches or administered for the benefit of a few fortunate shareholders. The rural cemetery law, as amended in 1879, allows them to divide among themselves the net profits from the sale of plots. Realizing about twenty thousand dollars for an acre, which hardly cost two thousand, their investments bring large revenues and are esteemed valuable. By assuming the guise of benevolent societies, owners succeeded in evading payment of the taxes which their less fortunate neighbors are obliged to pay. The trustees are never called upon to make reports to the State, and they give but scanty information to their stockholders.

In Portugal and Japan persons dying from cholera must be cremated. In Tokio many thousand bodies are incinerated annually, and the expense rarely exceeds a couple of dollars per body. The city of Paris pays less than sixty cents for burning the remains of a pauper. The cost of a funeral is regulated by that city according to the station and vanity of the survivors, who may choose out of nine classes and pay from $18\frac{3}{4}$ francs to 7,184 francs—about half going into the treasury of the churches. The average cost of a burial in New York is \$100; here are items of a bill which some of the poorest pay for the privilege:

For the grave and plain coffin.....	\$27
“ “ hearse and coach.....	16
“ “ shroud and ice.....	9
“ “ undertaker, etc.....	3
	<hr/>
	\$55

Persons in distress take no time to consider whether the charge is reasonable, or if they can afford to pay it. It is a grievous

wrong that the ignorant poor are permitted to tax themselves chiefly for the benefit of funeral interests. That it often costs a poor man more to die than to live is exemplified by an incident which recently occurred. The husband of an Irish woman was in the habit of going on periodical sprees. Once when his absence was more prolonged than usual, the poor creature was informed that Mike Murphy had been found in the river and that his body was at the morgue awaiting identification. Although the face was bruised, she recognized him by a scar on the leg and the blouse he wore. She had a woman's heart, and, forgetting the abuse he had heaped upon her, she engaged an undertaker to give him the customary funeral. That careful man of business* accepted the order only when he became secured by a policy on the life of Mr. Murphy for \$180. Members of his lodge were invited to the wake and followed the body in six coaches, when he was interred in a gorgeous casket. Mrs. Murphy, having paid the bill of \$165, was counting her little change and pondering what she might do to earn a living, when—Mike walked in. He had been drunk in Jersey and had been sobered by the news of his own funeral.

Rather than deny a dear relative, even if he were the vilest of his race, a Christian burial, the destitute deny themselves the necessities of life.

Mr. D. O. Mills and others are investing millions to provide decent lodgings for deserving poor while they live; are there no philanthropists who will erect crematories to relieve their distress when death visits them? It would require comparatively small amounts. Reasonable charges and continued use would make such enterprises self-sustaining. Five dollars for a decent urn burial, including religious service, would be sufficient. Whoever has been bereaved of dear ones, appreciates the craving for the comfort of religion at such a time; and no true belief conflicts with the wishes of man as to the disposition of his body. Why then should clergymen, chosen guardians of our souls, hesitate to minister to the family of the person who prefers the cleansing flame to the decomposing earth?

The history of Potter's Field in New York before it was located at Hart's Island, offers further proof of the mutability of "sub-

*A recent investigation of hospitals in Germany disclosed a practice which throws a peculiar light on devices of some followers of this calling. Nurses who promised to get their patients to become customers when dead, were paid a commission long before death was thought of by their intended victims.

urban" graveyards. First established in 1794 at the junction of Bloomingdale and the old Boston post roads, on the present site of Madison Square, it was removed to Washington Square in 1797, where victims of the yellow fever were interred in 1822. The city bought for a Potter's Field in the following year ten acres of ground bounded by Fifth and Sixth avenues and Fortieth and Forty-second streets, where the reservoir was built in 1837. It was then moved to a square bounded by Third and Fourth avenues and Forty-ninth and Fiftieth streets, where it remained up to 1857, when by resolution of the Common Council of April 27, the 100,000 bodies that had accumulated were ordered to Ward's Island and the old ground transferred to the Woman's Hospital. Finally, the Potter's Field was placed on Hart's Island in 1870. How long it may remain there without creating uneasiness is a question. Hart's Island, fifteen miles from the City Hall, lies in the Long Island Sound, between Westchester and Sand's Point, near Travers Island, the summer home of the New York Athletic Club. Over 100,000 corpses have been interred there. Of 4,500 bodies annually buried, 150 in a trench, in registered and numbered coffins, very few are ever claimed. If the city were to incinerate those bodies instead of burying them it would save expenditure, avoid danger of contagion in times of epidemic and set a worthy example.

Innumerable proofs, furnished by scientific men of all ages, recently by the French doctor, Pasteur, show that earth retains, instead of destroying, the germs of disease contained in a body, and that in some degree it will vitiate its surroundings.

Since Hannibal's army was decimated by effluvia from an ancient graveyard he unwittingly demolished, history has repeated itself. The cholera in London in 1854 was ascribed to the upturning of earth where victims of a previous plague had been buried.

The French Academy of Medicine located the origin of diseases of the lungs and the throat in putrid emanations from the Parisian cemetery, "*Père la Chaise*." Of the older churchyards of Paris, once honeycombed with graves, that of the "Innocents" is remarkable. Established on the present site of the market called "*Halles Centrales*," it bred pestilence for centuries without hindrance. Finally, it became notorious as a nuisance, so that it had to be abolished. Innumerable skeletons were unceremoniously

carted to the Catacombs on April 7, 1786. Lyon Playfair asserts that Roman fever originates not in the Pontine Marshes, but in decaying bodies of the millions buried in the Eternal City. Doctor Domingo Freire found in cemeteries of Rio de Janeiro myriads of microbes in corpses, identical with those in persons stricken with yellow fever, a year after burial.

Drainage from cemeteries in Philadelphia has polluted water of the Fairmount reservoir. The centennial dysentery of 1876 has been attributed to this cause. A continued prevalence of typhoid fever in this sparsely inhabited city must be ascribed to the same cause.

Mortality by yellow fever was twice as large in portions of New Orleans where large cemeteries are located than elsewhere.

In Cuba this plague rages almost continually. Bodies of the victims of disease and Spanish cruelty, estimated to number 200,000, are inadequately protected against high temperature and moisture; their emanations are a menace to our soldiers more terrible than Spanish guns. American officers should be delegated to destroy these bodies before they do harm. The Austrian Government permits the destruction of those who have fallen on the field of battle by the erection of pyres, a practice which ought to be made obligatory on the military authorities of all civilized nations. Over a hundred thousand bodies of Napoleon's army of invasion were cremated in 1812 by Russians. More men died before Sebastopol by inhaling miasma of putrified bodies than were killed by the enemy. Some 40,000 corpses poisoned the air after the battle of Sedan, until inhabitants of adjacent Belgian villages prevailed on their government to appoint in 1871 an officer to relieve the distress. By saturating them with naphtha, he succeeded in burning 300 bodies in an hour, until all were consumed. Long experience in the East Indies has shown that danger increases with moist heat. Neither burial nor disinfectants can sufficiently protect the health of our army.

Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill said in a report to our Common Council May 30, 1825: "Earth purifies contents of graves on the principle that water, in cleansing clothes, becomes itself foul."

A commission recently appointed to investigate sanitary conditions of all graveyards in Denmark, was obliged to condemn 605 out of a total number of 650. German authorities have forbidden the use of water from any well situated within 300 yards of a

grave. Experience has shown that cemeteries should, by law, be banished far outside the limits of any city; that no grave should be opened before complete decomposition of the body, and that therefore only one body should be permitted in one grave. Graves not less than ten feet deep should be located in dry, porous soil only.

Precautions like these would lessen the danger, but no method, other than cremation, will absolutely destroy all germs of sickness in a cast-off body—none by which, without giving offense, it can swiftly be converted into ashes.

Our veneration for Alexander Hamilton did not originate with his handsome memorial in Trinity churchyard; no statue in Westminster Abbey can express the love Englishmen cherish for Gladstone. Discoverers of the hidden powers of nature, composers of our sweet melodies, teachers of morals and religion need no lettered stones to remind posterity of their existence.

Since thirty years ago, cremation has been reintroduced in civilized communities, many thousand bodies have thus been disposed of, including those of Hans von Bülow, George du Maurier, Jacob Moleschott, F. Gregorovius and Anton Seidl. Instead of condemning their memory, because they refused to allow their corpses to become offensive, let us follow their noble example and help to remove one of the most odious stains on our civilization. Then we may hope some day to enjoy the pleasures of life without fear of the dead.

LOUIS WINDMÜLLER.